

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Bulgaria

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SUBJECT Youth Brigades in Bulgaria

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1. For about three years, from 1947 to 1950, the Bulgarian Communist Party, through Bulgarian youth organizations, carried on an intensive campaign, in which young men and women from 17 to 30 years of age, the latter being mostly university students, were urged to join the "Young Guard" Youth Brigade (Mladezhka Brigada "Mlada Gvardia"). This nationwide campaign affected the upper classes of the secondary schools and universities. Youth Brigades were abolished in 1950.
2. The purpose of the Youth Brigade was twofold: it aimed, on the one hand, at helping in the construction of dams, railroad embankments, and other public works, and on the other, at giving the youth political indoctrination, while offering them some rudimentary training in the handling of a carbine.
3. In the spring of 1949 DSNM (Dimitrovski Sŭyuz na Narodnata Mladezh; Dimitrov Union of People's Youth), membership in which was compulsory for all university students, launched a vigorous campaign urging the students to join the Youth Brigade and help in the reconstruction of the country as a patriotic duty. Mindful of the purge which had occurred among them in the preceding year, university students who, up to that time, had not been too responsive to the propaganda and calls of the youth organizations, joined in large numbers.

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4. Having signed up for the Youth Brigade, [] volunteers were subjected to a thorough physical examination, which included blood and urine tests and X-rays. This examination was given in the university dispensary. Students who were not in perfect health were not accepted. 25X1
5. Each university department or faculty had its own camp and each worked in a different part of the country or on a different project. Many such units worked on the construction work being carried out in and near Dimitrovgrad. 25X1
6. At the beginning of July 1949, the volunteers [] were given railroad tickets to a place near Dimitrovgrad, where the camp was located. The camp consisted of five or six wooden, barrack-like buildings, three or four of which were used as dormitories for the students. Another housed the dispensary, whose staff consisted of one physician and his assistant. Another building was used for cooking and storage. The barracks were provided with electricity.
7. A fountain provided both bathing and drinking water. There was no hot water, however, so that during the 35 days they spent at the camp the students had no real bath. About 200 meters from the camp was the Maritsa River, in which the students could bathe when it was not muddy. The toilets were located at some distance from the barracks. They were enclosed by a fence, but had no roofs.
8. On arrival at the camp, the students were issued their working youth uniforms, which were identical for men and women, and consisted of a pair of shorts, a shirt, a jacket, a pair of rubber-soled shoes, and a cap. They were also given two blankets and a mess kit equipped with a fork and a spoon, but no knife.
9. [] did not recall how many persons were in the camp (Vaptsarov), nor [] remember the name of the commander of the camp. The students were divided into two detachments (otryads), which worked alternately on the morning and afternoon shifts. The first detachment was called "Stoyan Edrev" Otryad and the second one was called "Vaptsarov" Otryad. Each detachment was subdivided into seven troops (chetas), and each troop, in turn, was divided into about seven production groups (proizvodstvena grupas). [] belonged to a [] group of the troop, which was called []. There were about 30 or 40 [] in each troop and about four or five in each production group. There were 70 to 80 [] to each barrack, which was equipped with double-decker bunks. 25X1 25X1 25X1
10. Each troop and production group had a leader, and each production group had one person at the work site who was responsible for giving first aid. The duty of the production group leader was to report any illness at roll call and to report on the work accomplished by the group at the end of each work day. The group leader reported to the troop leader, who, in turn, reported to the detachment leader. Relations between the leaders and the crews were friendly.
11. The daily program of the camp consisted of an eight-hour work day, nominally a six-day week, with Sundays free. However, because many Sundays were declared so-called shock days (udarni dni), [] group had only two free Sundays during the entire 35-day work period. Each day after work, political meetings were held, at which Leninism-Stalinism and other ideological topics were discussed for the purpose of indoctrinating the students in Marxist ideology. Gymnastic exercises were given every day before work. Twice or three times a week instruction was given in operating, dismantling, and re-assembling a carbine. Carbines were borrowed from the men's barracks for this purpose. Toward the end of the work period, a target shooting contest was held, during which each young woman shot 20 rounds. One young woman received 18 points out of a possible 20. 25X1

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12. The work site was located some three or four kilometers from the camp. The workers on each shift walked to the work site, where the tools were kept and issued to them upon arrival. The men and women marched in separate formations. The young women who worked on the morning shift rose at 3:30 a.m., washed at the fountain, made their beds, which consisted of a layer of straw covered with a blanket, cleaned the barracks, lined up for roll call and daily report, and marched to the work site, where they arrived at about 4:30 a.m.. There they were given breakfast, which consisted of tea with sugar, marmalade, cheese, and bread, which had been brought from the camp. They began work at 5:00 a.m., digging earth with shovels and crowbars and hauling it on wheelbarrows to the railroad embankment which they were helping to construct. Every hour, they were allowed 10 minutes' rest, during which time all of them slept.
13. Work on the morning shift ended at 1:00 p.m., but by the time the tools had been gathered and the progress of the work recorded, another hour had passed, so that the group arrived at the camp at 3:00 p.m..
14. The afternoon shift worked from 1:00 to 9:00 p.m.. Lunch was served to them at the work site. This meal usually consisted of a soup with very little fat in it, some meat dish, such as a stew, twice a week, vegetables or macaroni, and a dessert, e.g., fresh or stewed fruit, or candy.
15. The troop which distinguished itself at work was honored with the title of leading troop (cheta pŭrvenets), and its members were given small flags. Before returning to Sofia at the end of the work period, the students were given written certificates concerning their participation in the Youth Brigade.
16. The students never left the camp during the entire 35 days. Morale in the camp was good, and the moral code was strict. Members of both sexes worked on the same projects and attended the same gatherings, but romance was strictly forbidden. The young women were not allowed to smoke or to use cosmetics. The young men were given cigarettes. Food was barely adequate to keep them going.
17. The camp was kept clean and there were no vermin. The water was good. There were no alcoholic drinks, nor even soft drinks. Health was good, although one or two young women were taken to the hospital in Dimitrovgrad. Women often fainted because of the heat, the hard work, and the lack of nourishing food, and were given first aid by their colleagues. The young women suffered from lack of sleep, and upon their return to Sofia, the aftereffects of the poor diet and the strain took the form of pains in the chest, and kidney and stomach disorders.
18. There were no movies or other forms of entertainment. Recreation consisted of song fests with guitar or harmonica accompaniment, and dancing the "hora," a Bulgarian circle dance, which everyone was too tired to enjoy.

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